

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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'WE'VE FOUND OUR WAY HOME': HARDIN BROTHERS BRING PASSION OF HORSE RACING TO CHURCHILL DOWNS STABLE GATE

LOUISVILLE, KY (Sunday, May 23, 2021) — **Donnie** and **Ken Hardin** are hard to miss when backside employees enter the Churchill Downs Stable Gate each morning. The brothers, who work on the security team, bring their passion of horse racing and the spirit of their father with them to each shift at Churchill Downs.

“Churchill Downs stands for everything I love,” Ken simply stated.

The Hardin’s faces light up every time a new horse racing star enters the stable gate or when they get the opportunity to tell a story about horses that strike up memories of their father. The Stable Gate office is filled with horse racing memorabilia and different photos where all of the employees, not just the Hardins, can share personal stories. One specific photo of Churchill Downs’ all-time leading jockey **Pat Day** brings back memories of the Hardins’ late father, **Charles**, every time they enter the office.

“I was about 14-years-old when Pat Day won the (1992) Kentucky Derby (aboard **Lil E Tee**) but I remember it well,” Donnie said. “My dad was taken back by the legendary jockey’s humble demeanor after his big accomplishment. I learned a lot from that.

“The next spring Churchill Downs had an autograph session featuring Pat Day. At the time, I collected sports trading cards, including jockey cards. I had acquired his card with his famous photo with his arms raised in victory following his Derby win. Knowing that my dad loved the picture, I gave it to him. We went to the track the day of the autograph session and I had Pat sign a commemorative coffee cup and my dad had him sign the card. My dad said, ‘Pat, it’s a pleasure to meet you.’ Day replied, ‘Thank you, the pleasure is all mine.’ And he signed the card. It was the only autograph my dad ever got in his life.”

Charles Hardin passed away in 2009.

“We feel his spirit when we are on the grounds,” the Hardins said. “We both sort of take on his personality, like he is with us and always smiling. We carry that with us and try to share those good feelings with every interaction we have.”

The Hardin brothers grew up in South Louisville and both attended Iroquois High School. Their first time at Churchill Downs was in 1985. They had tickets in their family’s box on Kentucky Oaks Day.

“The first time I was ever on the backside of Churchill Downs it was in 1987,” Donnie said. “I was 10-years-old and got to see the Derby favorite, **Demons Begone**. I got to feel that Derby week excitement on the backside and it’s always stuck with me.”

The Hardins have endless stories. Their favorite horses include **Secretariat**, **Swale**, **Risen Star** and **Justify**.

“Secretariat is the king. The first thing our father ever taught us about horse racing was about ‘Big Red,’” Donnie said. “Kentucky Derby 110 was one of my first Derby memories. I was 7-years-old at the time and Swale won. I thought he was the most amazing creature alive. He went on to finish off the board in the Preakness and won the Belmont Stakes. ... I think that’s where my emotional and sentimental connection to horse racing began.”

In 2018, Ken was diagnosed with cancer. He went through radiation for 29 straight days at 7 a.m. but never once missed a day of live racing at the Fall Meet.

Just a few months ago, Ken went to a follow-up doctor’s appointment for his cancer. He brought a horseshoe worn by Kentucky Derby winner **Authentic** and one worn by Longines Kentucky Oaks winner **Shadaresthedevil** – two symbols for good luck.

His doctor said he was now 100% cancer free.

“The everyday excitement is what we love about Churchill Downs,” Ken said. “From meeting people from all different cultures with so many personalities and the amazing workers on the front and backside. Those who work under the Twin Spires have a special spirit about them. It is home. We take our jobs very seriously but Donnie and I will forever be reliving a great part of our childhood when we are here.”

SCONSIN DANCES HER WAY TO BALLERINA FOLLOWING DOMINATING WINNING COLORS VICTORY – **Lloyd Madison Farms**’ homebred **Sconsin** is on the path to the Aug. 28, \$500,000 Ballerina (GI) at Saratoga following her convincing 3 1/4-length score in Saturday night’s \$150,000 Winning Colors (GIII) at Churchill Downs.

“She really backed up her (runner-up) effort in the Derby City Distaff (GI),” trainer **Greg Foley** said. “She’ll run between now and that race but we are keeping that on target.”

Sconsin earned a 96 Brisnet Speed Rating for her victory Saturday night.

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DOWN THE STRETCH – Racing continued Sunday at Churchill Downs with a 10-race program that got underway at 12:45 p.m. There was an \$81,455 carryover in the 20-cent Derby City 6. ... There were 17 horses that worked on the turf Sunday at Churchill Downs including Jeff Ruby Steaks (GIII) winner **Like the King**, who recorded the fastest five-furlong move in 1:00.40, the best of seven at the distance. ... Racing will continue Thursday for Twilight Thursday for a special late post of 5 p.m. Fans can enjoy the eight-race program along with \$1 Blue Moon and domestic drafts, live music and food trucks. ... Saturday is Stephen Foster Preview Day with seven stakes events. Saturday's 11-race card will be drawn Wednesday. ... Trainer **Todd Pletcher** reported Allaire DuPont Distaff Match Series Stakes (GIII) winner **Spice is Nice** is possible to enter the June 26, \$300,000 Fleur de Lis (GII). “She bounced out of the (DuPont Distaff) very good and we might consider the Fleur de Lis,” Pletcher said. “Nothing is confirmed yet. She’s always been a big filly that we felt would improve with age. She seems to be carrying some better weight now.” ... For more information about the Churchill Downs Spring Meet and to purchase tickets, visit <https://www.churchilldowns.com/calendar/featured-events/>.

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